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Senate confirms Gabbard as Trump's director of national intelligence after Republicans fall in line

By DAVID KLEPPER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate on Wednesday confirmed Tulsi Gabbard as President Donald Trump's director of national intelligence after Republicans who had initially questioned her experience and judgment fell in line behind her nomination.

Gabbard was an unconventional pick to oversee and coordinate the country's 18 different intelligence agencies, given her past comments sympathetic to Russia, a meeting she held with now-deposed Syrian President Bashar Assad and her previous support for government leaker Edward Snowden.

Gabbard, a military veteran and former Democratic congresswoman from Hawaii, was confirmed by a 52-48 vote, with Democrats opposed in the sharply divided Senate where Republicans hold a slim majority. The only "no' vote from a Republican came from Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky.

She is the latest high-ranking nominee to win Senate confirmation as the new administration works to reshape vast portions of the federal government, including the intelligence apparatus.

Staffers at the CIA and other intelligence agencies have received buyout offers, while lawmakers and security experts have raised concerns about Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency accessing databases containing information about intelligence operations.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence was created to address intelligence failures exposed by the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. Republicans have increasingly criticized the office, saying it has grown too large and politicized. Trump himself has long viewed the nation's intelligence services with suspicion.



Tulsi Gabbard, President Donald Trump's choice to be the Director of National Intelligence, arrives to appear before the Senate Intelligence Committee for her confirmation hearing on Capitol Hill Thursday, Jan. 30, 2025, in Washington.

Associated Press

GOP senators who had expressed concerns about Gabbard's stance on Snowden, Syria and Russia said they were won over by her promise to refocus on the office's core missions: coordinating federal intelligence work and serving as the president's chief intelligence adviser.

"While I continue to have concerns about certain positions she has previously taken, I appreciate her commitment to rein in the outsized scope of the agency," said Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, adding that Gabbard will bring "independent thinking" to the job.

McConnell, the former GOP leader, said in a statement after the vote that in his assessment, Gabbard brings "unnecessary risk" to the position.

"The nation should not have to worry that the intelligence assessments the President receives are tainted by a Director of National Intelligence with a history of alarming lapses in judgment," McConnell said.

Democrats noted that Gabbard had no experience working for an intelligence agency and they said her past stances on Russia, Syria and Snowden were disqualifying. They also questioned whether she would stand up to Trump if necessary and could maintain vital intelligence sharing with American allies.

"We simply cannot in good conscience trust our most classified secrets to someone who echoes Russian propaganda and falls for conspiracy theories," said Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York, who suggested that Republicans were only supporting Gabbard because of pressure from Trump.

"Is Ms. Gabbard really who Republicans want to lead intelligence agencies? I'll bet not," Schumer said.

Until GOP support fell into place, it was unclear whether Gabbard's nomination would succeed. Given the 53-47 split in the Senate, Gabbard needed virtually all Republicans to vote "yes."

Trump's "Make America Great Again" base has pressured senators to support Trump's nominees, and Elon Musk, the president's ally, took to social media recently to brand Sen. Todd Young, R-Ind., as a "deep-state puppet." Young had raised concerns about Gabbard but announced his support after speaking with Musk. The post was deleted after they spoke, and Musk later called Young an ally.

Gabbard is a lieutenant colonel in the National Guard who deployed twice to the Middle East and ran for president in 2020. She has no formal intelligence experience and has never run a government agency or department.

Gabbard's past praise of Snowden drew particularly harsh questions during her confirmation hearing. Snowden, a former National Security Agency contractor, fled to Russia after he was charged with revealing classified information about U.S. surveillance programs. ❑





NYC mayor's lawyer says corruption case is 'over,' but charges remain in place for now

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and LARRY NEUMEISTER
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A lawyer for New York City Mayor Eric Adams expressed confidence Wednesday that the criminal case against the Democrat is over, even though the Justice Department official who ordered the charges dismissed left the door open to the case being brought back next fall.

"There is no looming threat. This case is over. It will not be brought back," the attorney, Alex Spiro, told reporters. "Despite a lot of fanfare and sensational claims, ultimately there was no evidence that he broke any laws ever."

But as Spiro touted what he described as total victory over a "misguided prosecution," the reality of the Justice Department's move, outlined in a two-page memo sent Monday, is more complicated.



New York City Mayor Eric Adams exits from federal court in New York, Nov. 1, 2024.
Associated Press

For now, the charges against Adams remain in place.

Acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove in his memo directed the interim U.S. attorney in Manhattan, Danielle Sassoon, to dismiss the charges "as soon as is practicable." A spokesperson for her office declined to comment.

There have been no new filings in the case in the two days since the memo became public.

Bove wrote that the order to halt the case was made without "assessing the strength of the evidence" against Adams but was instead intended to allow him to focus on executing the Trump administration's priorities around immigration and crime.

The potential dismissal of the charges was also contingent on Adams agreeing that the case could be reopened in November following the mayoral election, Bove wrote.

Those unusual terms have drawn skepticism from some Democrats, and fierce rebuke from the mayor's Democratic primary challengers, who contend that Adams has agreed to carry out Trump's hardline immigration agenda in exchange for his freedom.❑

2 top ICE officials are reassigned amid Trump administration frustrations over immigration arrests

By REBECCA SANTANA
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two top immigration enforcement officials have been reassigned amid frustrations in the Trump administration about the pace of immigration arrests, according to two officials with knowledge of the moves.

Staff members at Immigration and Customs Enforcement were informed Tuesday evening that two top officials in the agency responsible for finding and removing immigrants in the country illegally Russell Hott and Peter Berg had been reassigned, according to a Department of Homeland Security official and an administration official. The officials spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly on the issue.

The Department of Homeland Security said ICE "needs a culture of accountability that it has been starved of for the past four years."

"We have a President, DHS Secretary, and American people who rightfully demand results, and our ICE leadership will ensure the agency delivers," Homeland Security spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin said Wednesday in an emailed statement.

Berg will return to the ICE office in St. Paul, Minnesota, according to the Homeland Security official who spoke to the AP. Hott will return to ICE's Washington field office, according to The Washington Post, which was first to report the reassignments.

Todd Lyons, who was recently the top immigration enforcement official in the Boston area, will assume the top position at Enforcement and Removal Operations, and his deputy will be Garrett Ripa, the officials told the AP.

They said no reason was given for the reshuffle. But it came the day President Donald Trump's border czar, Tom Homan, said he was unsatisfied with the pace of immigration arrests and with recent releases of people from immigration custody.❑



White House border czar Tom Homan speaks with reporters outside the White House, Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025, in Washington.
Associated Press

Baltimore sues Glock over handguns that can easily be converted to automatic weapons

By LEA SKENE
Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — Baltimore is suing gunmaker Glock over design features that allow its handguns to be easily modified to become fully automatic weapons, which enables criminals to inflict more damage and makes the city more dangerous, attorneys argue in a complaint filed Wednesday.

The lawsuit follows similar cases brought against Glock in Chicago, Minnesota and New Jersey. They accuse the company of failing to protect the public by selling firearms that can be adapted with dime-sized switches to spray continuous gunfire up to 1,200 rounds per minute instead of firing one bullet each time the trigger is pulled.

"That's faster than the weapons of war that I used in the Army," Maryland Attorney General Anthony Brown said during a news conference Wednesday morning announcing it. "ATF agents call it 'spray and pray' because once the trigger is pulled, there's no control only carnage."

The state of Maryland joined the city of Baltimore as a plaintiff in the lawsuit.



A semi-automatic Glock pistol is fired at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), National Services Center, March 2, 2023, in Martinsburg, W.Va.

Associated Press

Often referred to as Glock switches or auto sears, the conversion devices can be bought for about $20 or 3D-printed.

They've received heightened attention in recent years because they're increasingly turning up at crime scenes.

Glock isn't the only gunmaker whose weapons can be adapted with switches, but critics say its handguns are among the easiest to convert.

With rare exceptions, federal law prohibits the sale and possession of machine guns.

"Glock could have designed its pistols to prevent auto sears from working. They chose not to. That choice cost lives," Brown said.

Glock didn't respond to a Wednesday email seeking comment, and it hasn't responded to previous AP requests for comment on lawsuits over the switches. But a gun industry group has condemned the New Jersey and Minnesota lawsuits as frivolous claims that abuse the judicial system and disregard federal law.

A report last year by the anti-violence organization Everytown for Gun Safety said modified Glocks are often used in crimes. And the company has long been aware that easy conversion is a selling point, said Eric Tirschwell, executive director of Everytown Law, which represents the plaintiffs in the Maryland lawsuit. The brand is perhaps best known for its popularity among law enforcement officers, who almost exclusively carry Glock handguns. But Baltimore Police Commissioner Richard Worley said the recent proliferation of Glock switches means his officers increasingly find themselves "outmatched by criminals."

Baltimore police recovered 65 modified Glocks in 2024, compared to 35 the previous year, officials said. Roughly half the people arrested with modified Glocks since the beginning of 2023 were under 21 years old, according to the suit. The complaint alleges that Glock switches are adding to a culture of violence among young men across Baltimore.❑

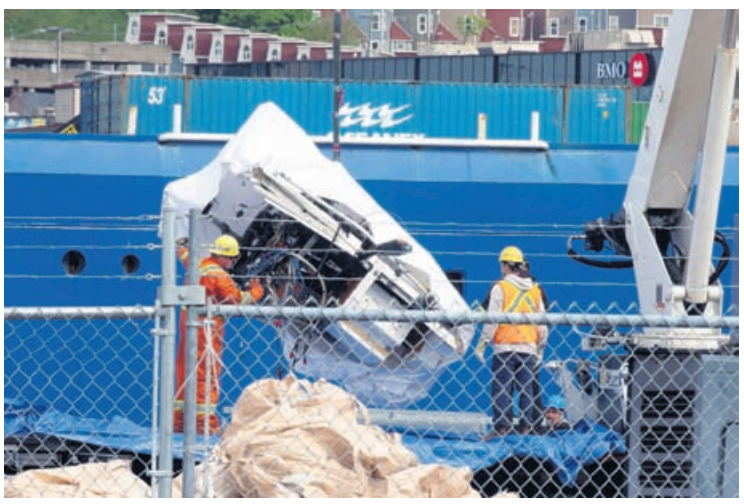
U.S. Coast Guard releases recording that appears to be audio of Titanic submersible implosion

By PATRICK WHITTLE
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — A recording released by the federal government appears to include audio of the implosion of the experimental submersible that went missing on its way to the wreck of the Titanic.

A National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration passive acoustic recorder located about 900 miles (1,448 kilometers) away from the implosion site picked up the sound, U.S. Coast Guard officials said in a statement. The recording became public on Feb. 7.The brief, staticky recording includes a loud noise that sounds somewhat like an underwater thunderclap. It then goes silent for its remaining few seconds.

The Coast Guard said in a statement that the audio clip "records the suspected acoustic signature of the Titan submersible implosion" on June 18, 2023, the day the submersible went missing.



Debris from the Titan submersible, recovered from the ocean floor near the wreck of the Titanic, is unloaded from the ship Horizon Arctic at the Canadian Coast Guard pier in St. John's, Newfoundland, Wednesday, June 28, 2023.

Associated Press

The implosion of the Titan killed all five people on board and set off a Coast Guard investigation and international debate about the future of private deep-sea travel. The Titan vanished on its way to the wreck of the Titanic in the North Atlantic Ocean, setting off a five-day search that ended with authorities telling the world that the vessel had been destroyed with no survivors.

Concerns were raised after the implosion because of the Titan's unconventional design and its creator's refusal to submit to independent safety checks. OceanGate, the Washington state-based company that owned the submersible, suspended operations in July 2023.

Titan operator Stockton Rush, who co-founded OceanGate, was among those who died in the implosion. The implosion also killed two members of a prominent Pakistani family, Shahzada Dawood and his son Suleman Dawood; British adventurer Hamish Harding; and Titanic expert Paul-Henri Nargeolet.

A Coast Guard panel performing a lengthy investigation into the submersible disaster heard two weeks of testimony last September. The testimony included dramatic moments, such as when a former OceanGate scientific director said the Titan malfunctioned during a dive just a few days before its implosion.❑

Syria's interim foreign minister says Russia-Iran ties to Assad are an open wound after war

By JON GAMBRELL
Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Syria's relations with Iran and Russia remain an open wound for its people after those nations backed autocratic President Bashar Assad during the long civil war, the country's new, interim foreign minister said Wednesday.

Speaking at the World Governments Summit in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Asaad al-Shibani acknowledged some "positive" signs from both Moscow and Tehran but did not elaborate.

However, he underlined the desire of the new government in Damascus to improve relations with the West and get sanctions on Syria lifted so the country could start rebuilding after the ruinous 14-year war.

"Syria has recovered its freedom and dignity" after decades of despotism, al-Shibani said. "It's a new period of peace and peace building."

Al-Shibani's very attendance and address at the Dubai summit were remarkable, reflecting the efforts by the former rebels who ousted Assad in December to gain new friends on the international stage. Qatar and Turkey, one-time rivals of the UAE over their support of Islamists in the region, had far closer ties to the rebels who ultimately took over Damascus.



Syria's Interim Foreign Minister Asaad Al-Shibani talks to Kuwaiti journalist Ammar Taqi during the World Governments Summit in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2025.
Associated Press

The UAE, a federation of seven sheikhdoms, had reopened its embassy in Syria in late 2018 as part of a thaw in relations. Assad then visited the UAE in 2022 as Abu Dhabi argued he should be brought back in from the cold among Arab nations, despite the bloodshed by his forces and allies in Syria.

In the immediate hours following Assad's ouster in December, a top UAE diplomat pointedly refused to discuss whether he was in the federation. Assad was later confirmed to have fled and been given sanctuary in Russia, where Vladimir Putin has long been one of his closest allies.

Among key concerns for al-Shibani are the sanctions imposed by the U.S. and the European Union. Estimates suggest it will cost at least $250 billion to rebuild Syria, which has a poverty rate of 90% and a gross domestic product of less than half of what it was before the war, according to the EU.

The sanctions were imposed on "the Syrian regime as result of its oppressions," al-Shibani said. "It's only natural to lift" them now.

Al-Shibani, from Syria's northeastern al-Hasakah governorate, is relatively new to the international scene though he attended the World Economic Forum in Davos in January. He had taken part in the 2011 protests against Assad that were part of the Arab Spring uprising, according to a biography published by the Foreign Ministry.❑

A joke petition asks for signers to help Denmark buy California as Trump eyes Greenland

By STEFANIE DAZIO
Associated Press

Is California for sale? A lighthearted petition to buy the state of California for Denmark prompted more than 200,000 signatures by Wednesday in response to President Donald Trump's talk about taking control of Greenland, a vast and mineral-rich Arctic island.

"Have you ever looked at a map and thought, 'You know what Denmark needs? More sunshine, palm trees, and roller skates,'" the petition asks. "Well, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make that dream a reality. "It is in the national interest to promote the extraordinary heritage of our Nation, so California will become New Denmark. Los Angeles? More like Løs Ångeles," it says.

Xavier Dutoit, the petition's organizer, got the idea last month while vacationing in the Philippines. He overheard an American tourist loudly discussing Trump's Greenland pitch.

"That American didn't seem to grasp how unhinged and absurd it was for any country's President especially in a stable democracy that the USA claims to be to offer or threaten to take over another sovereign country's territory," Dutoit wrote in an email to The Associated Press.

While Dutoit is not Danish he is Swiss-French he consulted a multi-national group of friends who are helping him, including Kenneth Haar, who is Danish and lives in Copenhagen.

"The Trump-Greenland issue is, by far, the biggest political issue in this country at the moment," Haar told AP in a Zoom interview. "It is considered a very depressing and a very dangerous situation."

While Løs Ångeles is a joke, there is another city in Southern California with a very real connection to the land of Vikings, Lego and Hans Christian Andersen. Known as "the Danish capital of America," Solvang was founded by three immigrants from Denmark in 1911. The city is popular with tourists, who come in droves for its aebleskiver pastries (similar to fritters), Scandinavian windmills, a main street called " Copenhagen Drive " and, of course, a Hans Christian Andersen Museum to honor the famous Danish fairy tale author. Danish royals have visited several times over the decades.

In 2019, Trump scrapped a trip to Denmark, blaming Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen for making a "nasty" statement when she rejected his first-term idea of buying Greenland as an absurdity. Greenland is a semi-autonomous territory of Denmark, a U.S. ally and fellow member of NATO.❑



Olsen's Danish Village Bakery and Coffee Shop in Solvang, Calif, Oct. 1, 2014.
Associated Press

Amnesty International details gruesome impact of gang violence on children in Haiti

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Haiti's children are increasingly caught in the crossfire of gang violence, forced to carry weapons, spy on police and rival gangs and run errands for gunmen, according to a report released Wednesday by Amnesty International.

One of 51 children interviewed by the human rights group said he was constantly pressured by a gang to fight alongside it.

"They killed people in front of me and asked me to burn their bodies. But I don't have the heart for that," the unidentified boy was quoted as saying.

An estimated 30% to 50% of gang members are now children, according to UNICEF.

Amnesty International said the children "had no choice, and that their involvement was predominantly out of hunger or fear."

Nearly two million people are on the verge of starvation in Haiti, and more than one million children are estimated to be living in gang-controlled areas, with 85% of the capital of Port-au-Prince under their rule.

One unidentified boy, 16, said he's paid to run errands for a gang.

"(The gangs) are in control. And there is nothing you can do about it," he was quoted as saying.



People line up to receive food at a shelter for families displaced by gang violence in the Kenscoff neighborhood of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Monday, Feb. 3, 2025.

Associated Press

If children refuse to follow a gang's orders, they or their family would be killed, according to the report, which relied on a total of 112 interviews and research done from May to October last year.

Children are not only in danger of gangs, but of vigilantes and police officers who believe they're working for them, according to Amnesty International. Girls and young women also have been collectively raped by gang members and infected with sexually transmitted diseases, often ending up pregnant in a country where health care is extremely limited.

One teen was raped by six men, and her sister by five others.

"There was so much blood," the unidentified younger sister said in an interview.

Another teen recounted how she drank bleach to try and kill herself after having a baby after being raped by three men who then left her naked in public.

"People found me on the street and put a dress on me," she said.

Amnesty International said many of those interviewed "scoffed at the idea of reporting their attacks to authorities."

A 16-year-old girl who was abducted and raped by several gang members said: "Are you kidding me? It's not possible…There is no police…The only chief in town are the gang members."

The violence also has led to injury and death.

One girl, 14, recounted how a ricocheting bullet pierced her lip in September 2024. Three months before that, her 17-year-old brother died from a stray bullet.

"I lost a huge presence in my life. Since then, I don't know how to be happy," the girl said.

The violence is especially punishing on children with disabilities, with some recounting how they had to leave behind crutches and wheelchairs during sudden gang attacks in their neighborhoods.

Amnesty International called on the Haitian government to better support children, restore education, provide mental health services, and resume court proceedings against children suspected of ties to gangs who are being held without charge.

It also said more resources including training and security are needed to help reintegrate children into society. "The international community cannot continue to make empty promises," the report said. "The country needs immediate and sustained technical and financial assistance to rescue a generation of boys and girls from being lost to repeated cycles of gang violence."❑

Australian hospital examines patient records after nurse claims to have killed Israelis



A police officer stands near where anti-Israel graffiti is painted on a wall in Sydney, Australia, on Dec. 11, 2024.

Associated Press

By ROD McGUIRK
Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — An Australian hospital is examining patient records after a nurse claimed online to have killed Israelis, officials said Wednesday, stressing that no evidence of harm to patients was uncovered.

The claim appears to have been the latest in a surge antisemitic attacks and rhetoric that have roiled Australia as homes, offices and businesses have been vandalised and a school and two synagogues were torched in just over a year with crimes targeting Jews.

A police strike force, established to focus on the antisemitic crimes in Sydney since the Israel-Hamas war began in 2023, was investigating potential offenses stemming from the online video, including breaches of hate speech law, New South Wales state Health Minister Ryan Park said.

Hate crime officials in Sydney and Melbourne the nation's largest cities where 85% of Australia's Jewish population lives are separately investigating the discovery of a trailer containing explosives, a list of potential Jewish targets and arson attacks on two synagogues.

Two nurses who took part in an online discussion with Israeli influencer Max Veifer during a night shift on Tuesday at Sydney's Bankstown Hospital were suspended on Wednesday, and Park said they would never work for the state health department again.

"They are vile, disgusting and deranged individuals," Park told reporters. ❑

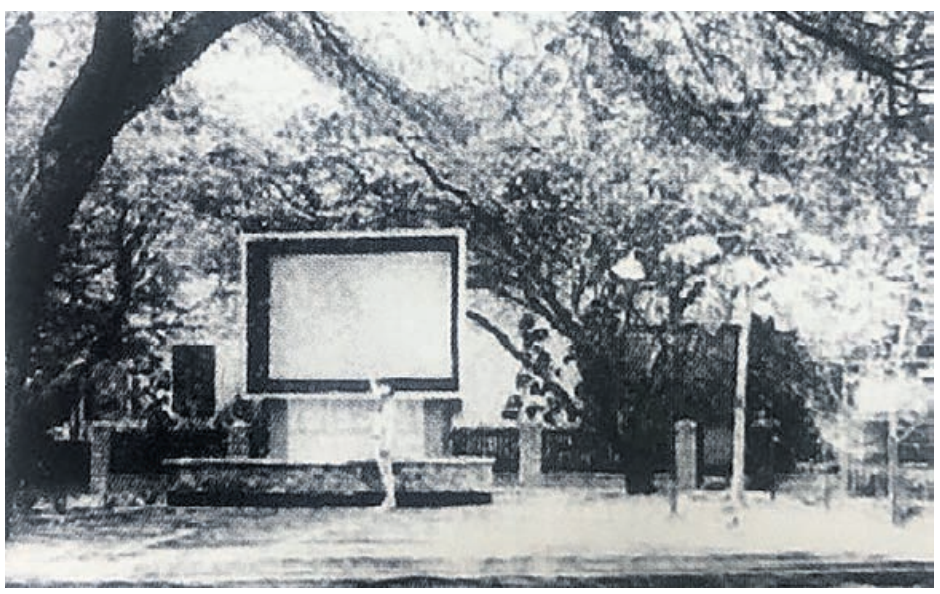


Forgotten gems

Open air movie theaters

(Oranjestad)—During the span of over 100 years, Aruba only saw five open air movie theatres. Now practically obsolete on the island, these theaters were once frequently visited by locals and migrants in the 20th century.

The first open air theater was constructed in 1920 and was commissioned by Shon Eduard (Eddy) de Veer. This theater was located at the Hotel Colombia in Oranjestad, which is now where the Aruban census office is located. The theater was simple; it only consisted of a screen, and visitors had to bring their own chairs to enjoy the popular silent movies of the time.



American migrants who worked in the refinery and lived in the Lago Colony in Sero Colorado also had their piece of the pie with their Open air Theatre, which formed part of the Esso Club, also known as the Pan-Am Club. It was at this theater that "Talkies" were first streamed, movies with sound. This theater mostly streamed American blockbusters for the American expats, this way making sure that these migrant were not missing out on entertainment from their home land.

In the 1950's and 60's, Savaneta saw their own open air theater, located in front of the Marinier's Kazerne (Marine Barracks). This theater was mostly visited by the neighboring marines, who didn't have much entertainment other than movies at that time.

The last and most recent open air theater was constructed in the form of a drive-in theater. A popular American concept, the Drive Inn located in Balashi was a hot spot for teenagers, who had the habit of cramming all their friends in one car to go see the movies. For this phenomenon there was a separate price that you had to pay called the "car crash".



This theater closed around 2012, but was re-opened during the pandemic in July 2020, where movies were streamed on a gigantic screen set up in front of stacked containers. However, this nostalgic form of entertainment did not last very long as it was closed again only a year or two later. Nowadays you can still see the stacked containers when you drive near the bridge in Balashi. ❑

Source: "De kolibrie op de rots en meer over de geschiedenis van Aruba" by Evert Bongers.



Papillon: Where Culinary Tradition Sparks with Timeless Elegance



Tucked away in the vibrant heart of the Village for over a decade and a half, Papillon isn't just a restaurant; it's a culinary adventure waiting to unfold. Picture this: a sanctuary where the flavors of the French Caribbean have danced harmoniously with classic French fare for the past 15 years, all set against the backdrop of a movie-inspired ambiance that's as enchanting as it is welcoming.

Located in the heart of Palm Beach and within walking distance from hotels and local markets in the area, Papillon takes the famous story of a French man experiencing the flavors and culture of the Caribbean and incorporates these aspects of the Caribbean touch into their French culinary repertoire. Step through the doors of the newly-expanded Papillon, and you're not just stepping into a dining establishment; you're stepping into a world where sophistication embraces you like an old friend. The decor, a homage to the allure of the iconic film, casts a spell of intimacy and comfort, urging you to settle in and relish every moment. Here, dining isn't just about sustenance; it's about indulging in an experience meticulously crafted to ignite your senses.

At the heart of Papillon's magic lies its menu – a symphony of flavors orchestrated by culinary artisans. Imagine savoring the decadent richness of foie gras or the sublime delicacy of frog legs, each dish a love letter to tradition infused with a dash of innovation. And oh, the spectacle of the Dover sole being expertly prepared tableside! It's culinary theater at its finest, leaving you spellbound with every bite. All this served with a backdrop of the Caribbean ambience, complete with live musical performances and an inviting and colorful twist to your dinner experience!

But wait, there's more! Enter the realm of the Chef's Table, a weekly extravaganza led by the maestro himself, Executive Chef Juan Ludeña. Prepare to be whisked away on a six-course odyssey, each dish meticulously paired with wines handpicked from the largest French wine selection on the island by the esteemed Maitre d' Michael Otten. It's a soirée reserved for those who truly appreciate the artistry of gastronomy – an exquisite symphony for the palate.

In essence, Papillon isn't just a restaurant; it's an oasis for epicurean explorers. It's where passion meets refinement, where every dish is a masterpiece waiting to be savored, and every moment is a celebration of the finer things in life. So if you're craving the warmth of French Caribbean delights, Papillon invites you to join them on an unforgettable journey for the senses. Bon appétit!

Papillon is located in Palm Beach in front of the Hilton Resort, and open from 5pm to 10pm. Early Bird takes places from 5pm to 7pm. For reservations or more information please contact the restaurant at +297 699 5400, e-mail them at info@papillonaruba.com or visit their website at papillonaruba.com❑



Aruba Tourism Authority honored loyal visitors at Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa!



The Aruba Tourism Authority recently had the great pleasure of recognizing Distinguished Ambassadors of Aruba. The honorees were respectively honored with a certificate for theiryears of visits, loyalty, and love for the island of Aruba.

The honorary certification is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation and to say "Masha Danki" to guests who have visited Aruba 10, 20, or 35 years or more consecutively.

The three levels of honor are as follows:

Distinguished Visitor (10>years consecutively visiting Aruba)
Goodwill Ambassador (20>years consecutively visiting Aruba)
Emerald Ambassador (35>years consecutively visiting Aruba)

The honorees were:
Distinguished Ambassadors
Mr. Chris Hoornbeck and Mrs. Kelli Otis from Canandaigua, New York, United States.
Mrs. Keyttin Silvarepresenting the Aruba Tourism Authority, and staff members of Manchebo Beach Resort & Spabestowed the certificate upon the honorees, presented them with gifts, and thanked them for choosing Aruba as their favorite vacation destination, as their home away from home.

The top reasons for returning to Aruba provided by the honoree was:

- Aruba's weather
- Aruba's beaches
- Aruba's food
- The people
- The hotel Manchebo

On behalf of the Aruba Tourism Authority, we would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the honorees for their continued visits to the "One Happy Island".❑



Create museum memories

ORANJESTAD — Museums are an integral part of conserving and honoring cultures, and Aruba is no exception. Our Island has a wide selection of various museums for our locals and visitors to see. Take this opportunity to learn about our island and experience a different day beyond the beach. Let us introduce to you these museums.

Museum of Industry Aruba

The Museum of Industry is located in San Nicolas—better known as the art capital of Aruba. This museum exhibits the industrial history of gold, aloe, phosphate, oil and tourism through elaborated displays and multimedia installations.

The Museum of Industry is situated in the Water Tower in San Nicolas and narrates Aruba's industrial history, which began in the 19th century. The Water Tower was built in 1939 and consists of three sections: the substructure, the high-rising vertical shaft, and the tank at the top. The Water Tower was purchased by the Monuments Fund in 2003 so it can be restored and preserved as one of Aruba's monuments. The Museum of Industry is part of Aruba Museum Foundation (Fundacion Museo Aruban), which is a foundation set to maintain, preserve, and protect the Aruban cultural sector, history, and nature. The museum of Industry is open daily from 9 am till 6 pm. For more information, check out their Facebook page Museum of Industry Aruba.

Archaeological Museum of Aruba

The Archaeological Museum of Aruba is located at Schelpstraat 42 in downtown Oranjestad. The renovated historic Ecury complex in the area has been transformed from a family home to a modern museum that preserves Aruba's Amerindian cultural heritage. This 21st century museum is especially designed to preserve valuable artifacts dating back to the Pre-Ceramic period of 2500 BC.

In the late 1980's, AMA identified its need for an adequate housing for its collection and activities. After studying various options, a project proposal was drawn up, including the acquisition and restoration of historical buildings in downtown Oranjestad.

These historical buildings were formerly the property of the Ecury family. The "Ecury Complex", is a cluster of single and two-story historic buildings, mainly Dutch colonial architecture from the late 19th and 20th century on a plot of approximately 1.700 m2.

In 1997, the Aruban Government bought the complex for the National Archaeological Museum project. In 2004, a financial agreement was signed with the European Development Fund and in 2006, restoration and construction work began on the monumental buildings and the soon-to-be exhibition space. In December 2007, the key to the complex was delivered and the museum's employees moved to the new location. The final design for the exhibit was completed in November 2007 and the permanent exhibit, financed by the Aruban Government and the Union of Cultural Organizations (UNOCA), opened in July 2009.

At the new location, the National Archaeological Museum Aruba disposes of approximately 500 m2 for its permanent exhibit. This exhibit conveys information on the origin and culture of the first inhabitants of the island through archaeological objects and modern exhibition techniques.

The new permanent exhibit gives the visitor an insight into the cultures that inhabited the island in Pre-Historical and Early Historical times. The museum also hosts attractive public programs, including lectures, educational projects, temporary exhibits and workshops.

The museum is open daily from 9:30 am till 4:30 pm. For more information check out the Facebook page Museo Arqueologico Nacional Aruba.❑

Lessons from our elders:

Plants and fruits for medicinal use

(Oranjestad)—Though western medicine is now widely used for common illnesses and to keep our bodies healthy and happy, it is still very common in every household in Aruba (and around the world) to have staple home remedies that is passed on through generations. Here are some tips that our elders have passed on to us over the years.

Pineapple

Pineapple has more uses than topping it on your Christmas ham. According to elders, the skin of a pineapple is great to use to refresh your body. Clean the skin thoroughly and make tea or warapa* with it. It is said that this tea can also be drank after an operation on the ovaries or uterus. This gets rid of irritation and inflammation.

When the fruit is unripe and green, this can be used to stimulate menstruation flow in women. This also stimulates the passing kidney stones. When ripe, the fruit can be used for poisoning in the gut and can help treat rheumatic diseases, like arthritis.

However, breastfeeding women who cannot produce much milk are advised not to consume too pineapple, and people with acid reflux are recommended to not consume any pineapple at all.

Arrowroot

Arrowroot is native to tropical America and can be sold as a powder or whole. It is said that you can take arrowroot powder and make a "shalup" (porridge) for stomach pain or when you're feeling weak. You can make it with milk too, but it is advised to best use just water. You can also add prunes for a bit of sweetness. Arrowroot shalup is also good to treat an unhealthy gut or for diarrhea.

To make arrowroot shalup, boil a bit of water and add one tablespoon of arrowroot powder and stir continuously until you reach porridge consistency. If you make a shalup with milk, add a pinch of salt. Raw arrowroot powder can be used to powder babies.

Eggplant/Aubergine

Eggplants, or aubergines, are easy to find in supermarkets around the world and can be grown all year round on the island. Related to potato and tomato, eggplants are good to calm nerves. It can also be used to lower blood pressure, by steeping its leaves in boiled water and drinking it. You can also make eggplant juice to help purify your blood. However, do make sure to drink slowly; let it mix with your spit and then swallow.

Eggplant kataplan* can also be used to treat skin tumors, abscesses and hemorrhoids. Eggplant kataplan can also be used externally to treat arthritis.

*warapa: term referring to a water and sugar solution, a.k.a simple syrup.
*kataplan: porridge-like mixture used externally for wounds or parts of the body that are painful or swollen.



Unique fauna of Aruba

For a small island, Aruba sure has a lot of unique treasures. Among these, we have some subspecies of animals that are unique to our island. These have evolved to perfectly adapt to our desert climate and make Aruba their home. At the same time, they are part of what makes Aruba truly one of a kind.

Cascabel (rattlesnake, Crotalus durissus unicolor)

According to the Arikok National Park, Aruba knows two kinds of snakes, the Santanero and the Cascabel. The cascabel belongs to the rattlesnake family. The cascabel is the only venomous snake from Aruba. It has a length of 65cm to 100cm, and is about 4 to 5cm wide. Its color varies from light brown to grey-brown, and its underbelly is white. On its back there are marks that are a little darker, in the shape of diamonds.

Its reproduction is oviparous, meaning the offspring can hatch from their eggs just before, during or immediately after laying.

The cascabel lives mainly in the Arikok National Park. It likes to live in dark places, and is thus found hidden among the limestone rocks and under stones. As a defense mechanism, the cascabel uses its rattle as a warning, and it is not an aggressive animal.

The cascabel feeds on lizards, small mammals such as rats and mice. It paralyzes or kills its prey with its venom, which is injected through a bite. The enemies of the cascabel are donkeys, goats, humans and cars. Humans are the biggest enemy of the cascabel, as they kill them and destroy their habitat for urbanization.

Shoco (burrowing owl, Athene cunicularia arubensis)

The shoco is a small bird which is seldom seen. They are active during the day but are more active later in the day and at night for hunting. These owls have very good night vision and very good hearing.
The shoco is the national symbol of Aruba.

The shoco has about 20cm of length, and the females are slightly heavier than the males. They are light brown in color, with many white spots. The belly of the Shoco is either white or light brown, and the shoco has striking yellow eyes. Its beak is yellow/green. Young owls do not have white spots and are lighter in color. The nest of the shoco is a burrow in the ground. If the shoco cannot find a burrow, it will dig one in soft soil. The shoco lays one or two eggs every other day until all the eggs are laid – a shoco can lay up to four eggs. The first owlets hatch after three to four weeks. The shoco owl takes care of the owlets for three months until they leave the nest. Only a few owlets survive.

The owlrs dig burrows in the ground with low grass vegetation. An owl can live up to nine years.

Its defense mechanism is simply to fly away or retreat to its burrows. They eat mostly insects, mice and lizards, and the main threats to their survival are boas – an invasive species introduced by humans as pets – and humans through destruction of their habitat.

Prikichi (parakeet, Aratinga pertinax)

The Prikichi is the national bird of Aruba. On Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, parakeets can be found, but each of the three islands has a different breed. The Yellow-shouldered Amazon parakeet that we have on Aruba is also found along the coast of Venezuela. Unfortunately, there is interbreeding between the breeds due to cage birds from, for example, Curaçao being released on Aruba. The parakeet population on Aruba is in danger due to extensive deforestation occurring on the island because of the growing population.

The prikichi weighs between 90 to 100 grams. It has a greenish-brown head with some yellow around the eye. The back and wings of the parakeet are dark green, and the underside of the body is a lighter shade of green. There is also a bit of blue in the wings. The parakeet's beak is gray/black.

Parakeets often use termite nests as breeding sites. Parakeets are found in all natural environments (mondi) of the island. It defends itself by flying away and loud cries. Parakeets eat seeds from the pods of the Kwihi tree, Divi Divi, and columnar cactus. They also consume natural fruits. Its main predators are boa constrictors, humans.

Conew (cottontail rabbit, Sylvilagus floridanus nigronuchalis)

The Eastern Cottontail rabbit (Sylvilagus floridanus) was probably brought over to the island by Indian settlers thousands of years ago as a source of food. This rabbit, locally known as Conew, has spread all over the island and has become part of our ecosystem. The very adaptable Conew can live in a wide variety of habitats, including Aruba's xeric scrublands, where it typically grazes on weeds and grasses.

The Aruban Conew has a brownish grey color and a distinctive white belly. This white fur extends to the bottom of the tail which becomes visible as the rabbit runs. These rabbits can grow up to approximately 40 centimeters in length over their short lifespan of 3 years. Cottontail rabbits reach reproductive maturity when they are just 2 to 3 months old. A female rabbit, called a doe, finds a suitable nest spot under a shrub or rocks and lines it with fur. She can have an average of 3 to 4 litters per year averaging 5 young each. The doe only visits her young once or twice a day to nurse her babies for a period of 2 to 3 weeks. The young reach independence at 4 to 5 weeks.

The Aruban Conew is an endangered species and protected by Aruban law. The Conew is thought to have drastically declined due to an increase in human activities, habitat fragmentation and predation by the invasive Boa constrictor as well as feral cats and dogs. However, recently there seem to be more rabbit sightings in rural and wilderness areas and also in the National Park. This could be linked to a recent decline of the invasive Boa population after the long period of drought. As the Conew can reproduce very quickly, a short break in predation pressure can lead to a fast increase of rabbits. Sadly, the Boas are back on the rise again with the truly wet rainy seasons we have recently experienced. This could cause a new decline in the Conew population that was just starting to recover.

These are but a few of Aruba's beautiful inhabitant, which we must all contribute to protect. For more information, visit https://www.arubanationalpark.org/main/flora-fauna/ ❑







Fruit Loose & Veggie Boost: Aruban fruits and vegetables

Fresh fruits make a tropical holiday's picture complete. Whether you see the mangoes hanging in the trees or the fresh fruit cocktail on the side table of your pool bed, the link is there: you are in the tropics. Aruba grows her own fruits and veggies and there are some pretty out-of-space local species you may never had heard of, but really healthy and delicious.

Mispel

This is a fruit with a character (5-10 cm/2-4 inches). It does not ripe until it is picked or falls off the tree. Mispel is hard with a sandpaper like texture when immature, soft and juicy when ripe. It's technically a berry, but contains a skin similar to that of a kiwi. It's grainy and sweet, with a light, musky flavor. The sap or gum from the tree is also a source of 'chicle' the original ingredient used to make chewing gum. Rich in tannins, antioxidants shown to contain anti-inflammatory compounds, and vitamin C, essential for healthy immune function. Season: year- round.

Kenepa



Ovoid green fruit that grows in bunches on trees up to 30m high. The fruit is related to the lychee and have tight, thin but rigid skins. Inside the skin is the tart, tangy, or sweet pulp of the fruit covering a large seed. The pulp is usually cream or orange colored. Kenepa strengthens the immune system, and prevents the reproduction of bacteria and viruses in the body. This fruit is highly recommended to treat lung infections and urinary tract infections. It also helps to cure insomnia and rejuvenates the nervous system. Season: the fruit typically ripen during the summer.

Druif



There is no chance you did not bump into one of the sea grape trees while spending your vacation on Aruba. The sea grape plant is often used in ocean-side landscaping in sandy soil right on the beach and it produces clusters of fruit that resemble grapes. Are sea grapes edible? Yes, they are. Animals enjoy sea grapes and humans can eat them as well, and they are used to make jam. They contain very low calories and sugar, enabling good bacterium to digest food and excrete waste quickly which is effective in preventing constipation. Season: Sep-Oct.

Shimarucu



Maybe Aruba's most popular wild fruit tree. You may have noticed cars at the side of the road and people picking those red berries. Well, that's Shimarucu. The local habit to stop for these delicious fruits goes from generation to generation. Its fruit's degree of sour depends on the amount of rain it gets. Red Shimarucus tend to taste better than orange. The fruit has super power: a true vitamin bomb. Adults only need to eat 3-4 of these berries to meet their daily recommended amount of Vitamin C. Season: Rainy months (Oct-Jan).

Tamarind



A delicious, sweet fruit that has a wide variety of uses and applications, both for medicinal and culinary purposes. It is a medium-sized bushy tree with evergreen leaves and fruit that develops in pods characterized by long, brown shells. Inside is a sticky, fleshy, juicy pulp, which is the Tamarind fruit. Both sweet and sour in taste, the fruit contains a significant level of vitamin C, as well as vitamin E, B vitamins, calcium, iron, phosphorous, potassium, manganese, and dietary fiber. There are also a number of organic compounds that make tamarind a powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agent. Season: March.

When it comes to veggies the island certainly offers a home-grown selection. They taste delicious and have their specific talents to boost your immune system. Start the day with a 'batida' (smoothie) enriched with a local veggie touch or select your restaurant that offers local vegetable dishes to get the real pure taste of it.

Comcomber chiquito

This is a sort of local squash, but looks like a cucumber with prickly skin. The taste however is bitterer than the cucumber and the vegetable is smaller in size but bigger in width. Inside is a soft, fleshy pulp and seeds, just like the cucumber. Comcomber chiquito is grown in the island and used in salads and 'stoba' (stew) or on its own in vinegar. The veggie contains multiple B vitamins, including vitamin B1, vitamin B5, and vitamin B7 (biotin). B vitamins are known to help ease feelings of anxiety and buffer some of the damaging effects of stress. Additionally this veggie is rich in two of the most basic elements needed for healthy digestion: water and fiber. Season: year- round.

Yambo

Family of Okra, also known as 'lady's fingers': a green flowering plant. Okra belongs to the same plant family as hibiscus and cotton. A classic favorite dish in Aruba is Sopi di yambo. It has long been favored as a food for the health-conscious. It contains potassium, vitamin B, vitamin C, folic acid, and calcium. It's low in calories and has a high dietary fiber content. Recently, a new benefit of including okra in your diet is being considered. Okra has been suggested to help manage blood sugar in cases of type 1, type 2, and gestational diabetes. Season: year-round.

Bonch'i Cunucu

A long, small bean, boiled for a side dish or snack. Long beans have a chewy, crunchy texture–more so than snap beans–and a flavor reminiscent of the dry navy bean or asparagus. Besides stir-fry, soups and salads, the long bean is a good choice for stewing, braising (to remain chewy and firm), sautéing, shallow frying, and deep frying. With cooking, the long bean's bean flavor intensifies. Long beans are low in calories, about 45 calories per cup, and rich in vitamin A and also contain vitamin C and potassium. Season: year-round.

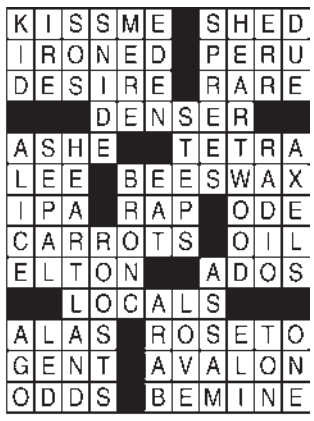
Pampuna



In the endless summer of Caribbean living we only have to concern ourselves with a wet season and a dry season. Still we do indulge heavily in the pleasures of pumpkin and enjoy Caribbean pumpkin recipes year round. A popular dish in Aruban restaurants is Sopa Di Pompuna, don't miss it. This dish is made of pumpkin soup, and parsley. Pumpkins are rich in flavonoid polyphenolic antioxidants such as xanthin, lutein and carotenes and also contain vitamins. Pumpkin seeds are a good source of omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, minerals and proteins. Pumpkins are used to make desserts, breads and soups.❑

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

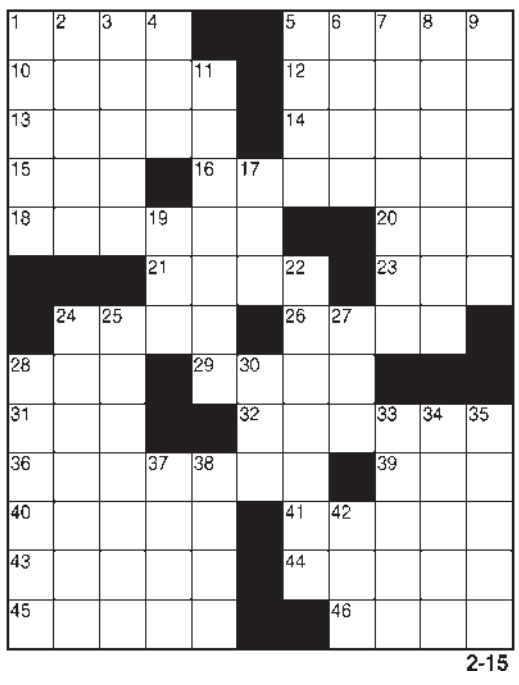


ACROSS

1 Uncloudy
5 Nigerian city
10 Make sense
12 Without aid
13 Italian physicist
14 Gunpowder ingredient
15 Mine yield
16 Bureaucratic hassle
18 Very popular
20 — Antonio
21 Woeful cry
23 Important time
24 Show up
26 Diplomatic skill
28 Phoned copy
29 Phone assistant
31 Paris pal
32 View from Yemen
36 Carnivore's craving
39 Price setting
40 Space visitor
41 Nearby
43 Caught some z's
44 Safe spot
45 Undoes a dele
46 Stiff drink

DOWN

1 Party gift
2 Find darling
3 Took it easy
4 Tire track
5 Hit the runway
6 Stepped down
7 "Can I talk to you?"
8 Self-contained
9 Venus's sister
11 Lets out early
17 Greek vowel
19 Deli meat
22 Prison sentence
24 Arthur's home
25 Rust, say
27 Help out
28 Electrical units
30 S&L offering
33 Hot spot
34 Art supporter
35 Deal maker
37 Convene
38 Finishes
42 Research site



2-15

A X Y D L B A A X R
is L O N G F E L L O W

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-15 CRYPTOQUOTE

N A G K Z O A T D G E H J Z F P , W S K

Z K Z O G F B T Q O A G V A T A G E H

J Z F O K . — L A U K D O J S V D

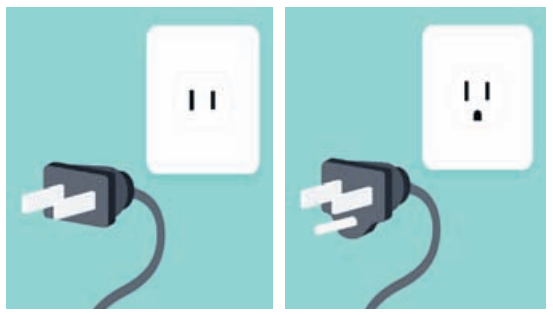
Cryptoquote: THE ONLY THING WE NEVER GET ENOUGH OF IS LOVE; AND THE ONLY THING WE NEVER GIVE ENOUGH OF IS LOVE. — HENRY MILLER

Cruise ship Schedule: February 11 - 18 2025

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
TUE	11	CARNIVAL MAGIC	09.00	22.00	C	1
WED	12	SEA CLOUD SPIRIT	08.00	14.00	G	1
		GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	C	1
THU	13	SEVEN SEAS NAVIGATOR	07.00	17.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN JADE	07.00	20.00	C	1
		MARELLA DISCOVERY	08.00	20.00	I	1
SAT	15	MAJESTIC PRINCESS	07.00	16.00	B	1
		AIDAPERLA	08.00	18.00	C	1
		STAR PRIDE	06.00	18.00	I	1
MON	17	RESILIENT LADY	09.00	23.59	C	1
TUE	18	CARNIVAL HORIZON	09.00	23.00	C	1
		NORWEGIAN VIVA	13.00	21.00	I	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basicbut important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.



Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.



Supermarket hours

Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.



Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

Classifieds

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San Nicolas
Imsan 24 hours
Tel.524 8833

PHARMACY ON DUTY

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Sta. Anna: Tel.586 8181
San Nicolas:
San Lucas: Tel.584 5119

OTHER

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Blood Bank Aruba 587 0002
Urgent Care 586 0448
Walk-In Doctor's Clinic
+297 588 0539

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Noord	**527 3200**
Sta. Cruz	**527 2900**
San Nicolas	**584 5000**
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Ambulancia	**911**
Fire Dept.	**115**
Red Cross	**582 2219**

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Prof. Taxi	**588 0035**
Taxi D.T.S.	**587 2300**
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American Airlines	**582 2700**
Avianca	**588 0059**
Jet Blue	**588 2244**
Surinam	**582 7896**

AID FOUNDATIONS

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Tel. 736 2952
Narcotics Anonymous
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Centre for Diabetes
Tel. 524 8888
Child Abuse Prevention
Tel. 582 4433
Quota Club Tel. 525 2672

General Info

Phone Directory Tel. 118



ARUBA TODAY

This Valentine's Day, consider what all types of love bring to your life

By DEVI SHASTRI
AP Health Writer

Valentine's Day is for lovers — but you don't need a romantic soulmate to celebrate.

The holiday is a chance to consider just how rich, diverse and beneficial every form of love is in the human experience, whether it comes from your family, friends, pets, neighbors or community.

Three experts shared how to nurture love in all its forms at a time when loneliness is an " epidemic," politics are divisive and turning to technology is often easier real-life social interactions.

You need more than just "the" love of your life

Romantic love a deep, intimate partnership with another person or persons is a valuable part of life. But experts say it's good to remember that we need to have several sources of connection.

"Especially as we get older, we recognize that no one relationship is going to provide us with everything," said Mikaela Frissell, a social worker for UT Health Austin.

Love isn't something that can easily be pinned down with a single definition or behavior, either.

As a verb, love has two things at play, according to epidemiologist Tyler VanderWeele, who directs Harvard University's Human Flourishing Program. It can be both or either "unitive" meaning you desire and want to be with the person or thing you love or "contributive," meaning you want to contribute to the good of your beloved.



The Robert Indiana sculpture "LOVE" stands in John F. Kennedy Plaza, commonly known as Love Park, in Philadelphia, April 13, 2020.

Associated Press

The experts also said an expanded definition and view of love opens up the possibilities toward whom and what you can direct these "unitive" and "contributive" feelings.

The connection between love, loneliness and health

In 2023, then-U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy declared loneliness a public health epidemic.

Murthy's report said half of Americans have experienced loneliness and that it poses health risks as deadly as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. The research also found that people with poor social relationships had higher risk of stroke and heart disease, and that isolation raises a person's chance of depression, anxiety and dementia.

Love's strong social connections, bonding and support are linked to better health, because it allows the brain to signal to the body that you are safe and take your nervous system out of "fight or flight," Frissell said. Research shows being with loved ones can lower blood pressure, stress hormones, reduce inflammation even help you sleep and better manage pain.

The ongoing Harvard Study of Adult Development, which is the underpinning of the book "The Good Life," showed the value of relationships across a lifetime.

Anthony Chambers, a psychologist and chief academic officer at The Family Institute at Northwestern University, said one of the Harvard study's findings was people who were happiest in their relationships at 50 were the healthiest mentally and physically at 80.

"The conclusion? Building meaningful and satisfying relationships is key to our health and well-being," said Chambers, who worked on the study early in his career.

How can I nurture love?

Simply put, intentionally seek out in-person connections, experts said.

What's not so simple is planning things with other people. It may be uncomfortable to sift through calendars to find a date for dinner with a busy friend or to call your sibling who doesn't have much to talk about. ❑

Perhaps it'll be awkward to strike up a conversation with the elderly neighbor you haven't met or join a softball team.

Acknowledge and interrogate the fears or assumptions that keep you from reaching out in those moments, Frissell said.

There is also doing good things for other people even if you don't know

Looking for love this Valentine's Day? Don't fall for Instagram romance scams

MENLO PARK, Calif. (AP) — If your social media suitor seems too good to be true, it might be a scam.

Facebook and Instagram parent company Meta Platforms is urging users to stay vigilant about " romance scams " ahead of Valentine's Day, warning of unsolicited messages through its apps and other social media platforms, as well as general text messages.

Scammers tend to pose as "attractive, single and successful individuals," Meta says. They often claim to have military, medical or business backgrounds, with photos either stolen from real people's accounts or generated through artificial intelligence. Initially, messages are sent to a large pool of people in the hopes of getting a response. A scammer than builds trust over a period of time before they ask their target for money either by claiming hardship or offering investment opportunities, usually in cryptocurrency.



The Facebook logo is seen on a cell phone in Boston, USA, Oct. 14, 2022.

Associated Press

Meta said it recently worked with research firm Graphika to take down romance scams in three common categories: those impersonating military officers, celebrity mimics and scammers posing as fake match-making agencies that target people in Africa "claiming to offer opportunities to meet rich men from Western countries or build relationships with 'African women.'" In addition to taking down scam networks, Meta says it is testing other tools to combat bad actors, including facial recognition technology that compares suspicious users' profile photos against a public figure's image. But, for now, that only works for celebrity impersonations.

To stay vigilant, Meta recommend people be suspicious of messages from strangers. If you do engage, try to verify the person's identity by looking them up on the platform check when their accounts were created or use a reverse image search on their photos. ❑

Mac McClung is back in the dunk contest, looking for a record third straight title

By TIM REYNOLDS
AP Basketball Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — About a year ago at this time, Mac McClung thought his dunk contest days were done. He'd been in the contest at the NBA's All-Star weekend twice, won it both times with plenty of flair and figured there was nothing else to prove.

Then a week later, he found himself practicing new dunks. And that's when he quickly realized that he has one and he insists, only one dunk contest left in him.

"I love the contest, man," McClung said. "It'd be an action in fear not to do it again. So, I'll do it one last time."

The 6-foot-2 McClung a standout guard in the G League who has appeared in only five NBA games is headed back to All-Star weekend, looking to become the first person to win the league's dunk title in three consecutive years. Nate Robinson is the only three-time dunk champion, though his didn't come in back-to-back-to-back years.

McClung breathed new life into the dunk contest and got rave reviews from some of the NBA's biggest names when he first won it in 2023, then went airborne over Shaquille O'Neal to win it again last year. Now he goes for three in a row in San Francisco on Saturday night, with San Antonio rookie Stephon Castle, Chicago rookie Matas Buzelis and Milwaukee second-year wing Andre Jackson Jr. providing the competition.

"I'm not going there to lose," Buzelis said.

Added Jackson: "I just want to be myself and put on a show."

Castle is confident as well, though he acknowledged he expects to feel some nerves on Saturday night.

"I get nervous for most games," Castle said. "I think it's just going to be another event for me."

When this weekend is over, they'll all head back to their NBA jobs.

McClung, for now, continues to wait for a real opportunity.



Osceola Magic's Mac McClung dunks during the slam dunk competition at the NBA basketball All-Star weekend, Saturday, Feb. 17, 2024, in Indianapolis.

Associated Press

His five NBA games have come with four NBA teams one with Chicago, one with the Los Angeles Lakers, two with Philadelphia and one with Orlando. He has scored 33 points in those games, 20 coming in one contest with the 76ers at Brooklyn on April 9, 2023.He hasn't scored an NBA point since that day.

"The easy answer is opportunity," McClung said. "It's not just Mac McClung. There's a lot of G League guys that can play in the league. There's a lot of guys I've seen in the G League and then they get an opportunity in the (NBA) and people are like, 'Man, he got so much better this last year.' And I'm like, 'No, he's been good.' I really have my faith in God, and believe I'm always right where I'm supposed to be."

For now, that's with the Osceola Magic. He is on a two-way contract with Orlando, and McClung is averaging 24.5 points and 6.1 assists during this G League regular season. He's been rookie of the year, he's been a G League champion and this season he's the reigning G League MVP.

"I take pride in the G League," McClung said. "Each year it's so hard because when you're on a two-way people are like 'Be ready, stay ready.' But I'm trying to win in the G League. That's important to me. Winning a championship is always the standard and hopefully we can do that this year in Osceola and apply even more pressure."

Winning back-to-back dunk contests has brought fame. People recognize McClung more now, but he hasn't changed. ❑

Baseball welcomes another season, with most pitchers and catchers reporting Wednesday

By MARK ANDERSON
AP Sports Writer

There's a new No. 2 in the New York Yankees' rotation behind Gerrit Cole. A familiar face is getting a fresh start leading the Cincinnati Reds. Meanwhile, Shohei Ohtani and Co. already have their title defense underway.

There's plenty to see as baseball returns Wednesday for most MLB clubs, with pitchers and catchers officially reporting at sites across Arizona and Florida.

The Chicago Cubs and Los Angeles Dodgers got an early spring training start ahead of their season-opening series in Tokyo, and a few clubs don't get going until Thursday.

But for most, Wednesday marks the start of a new season.

That includes the Yankees, who are welcoming back Cole, the 2023 Cy Young Award winner, after he chose to remain with the Yankees rather than opt out of his contract. He'll be joined in the rotation by Max Fried, a key addition as they try to return to the World Series.

New York lost to the Dodgers in five games, failed to bring back Juan Soto in free agency, then signed Fried to a $218 million, eight-year contract, the largest ever for a left-handed pitcher. Fried went 54-25 with a 2.81 ERA over the past five seasons with the Braves and was instrumental in Atlanta's 2021 World Series victory over the Astros.

Wednesday will also be Day 1 for new Cincinnati Reds manager Terry Francona. Cincinnati went 77-85 last season but has some promising young talent, led by young ace Hunter Greene. Francona won two World Series titles with the Red Sox and took Cleveland to the playoffs six times in 11 years.

That includes the 2016 World Series.❑



Los Angeles Dodgers' Shohei Ohtani, right, of Japan, walks back to the clubhouse at the Dodgers baseball spring training facility after working out Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2025, in Phoenix.

Associated Press

Lindsey Vonn says she 'would be proud to race with anyone' in team combined at the Olympics

By ANDREW DAMPF
AP Sports Writer

SAALBACH-HINTERGLEMM, Austria (AP) — It's not just downhill and super-G that Lindsey Vonn wants to compete in at the age of 41 at next year's Milan-Cortina Olympics.

After experiencing the new team combined at the world championships, Vonn also hopes to qualify for that event when it makes its Olympic debut in 2026 even after her campaign to pair with Mikaela Shiffrin this week didn't pan out.

"It's fun to be a part of a team," Vonn said. "I've never had that experience in a world championships or Olympics before. I've always loved the combined as an individual (event). They don't have that anymore. So this is my next best option. I get along great with every single member of my team and I would be proud to race with anyone." But at the worlds, Vonn was very public about her desire to race with Shiffrin, who ended up winning gold with Breezy Johnson. Vonn and AJ Hurt placed 16th on Tuesday.



United States' Lindsey Vonn, right, talks to United States' Lauren Macuga, center, and United States' Jacqueline Wiles, right, at the finish area of a downhill run of a women's team combined event, at the Alpine Ski World Championships, in Saalbach-Hinterglemm, Austria, Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2025.
Associated Press

The new event entails one racer competing in a downhill run and another in a slalom run, with their times added together to determine the final results.

Shiffrin and Vonn are the winningest female racers in World Cup history with 99 victories for Shiffrin and 82 for Vonn. Vonn is the all-time leader in World Cup downhill victories with 43 and Shiffrin holds the mark in slalom with 62 both records among men and women. "Would it have been a really cool thing to have 181 wins in one team? I think it would have been," Vonn said. "But if you're looking at what's best for the team, it's not me right now. That doesn't mean that next year things might change."

Vonn struggled in her downhill run of the combined, finishing 21st and a distant 2.51 seconds behind the leader, American teammate Lauren Macuga. Johnson was fourth, setting up her gold medal with Shiffrin.

That performance by Vonn followed a hooked gate that took her out of the super-G and a 15th-place finish in the downhill.

Having recently returned to ski racing with a new titanium knee after nearly six years of retirement, Vonn is playing catch up with her new equipment.

Vonn's longtime ski technician, Heinz Haemmerle, retired, so equipment supplier Head assigned her Chris Krause, who formerly worked for Didier Cuche and Bode Miller. But then Krause got sick, so she was assigned yet another technician, Rene Meusburger.❑

